

# PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION SHEET

## ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE

To control the spread of a contagious disease, public health authorities rely on many strategies. Two of these strategies are isolation and quarantine. Both are common practices in public health and both aim to control exposure to infected and potentially infected individuals.

### ***Isolation: For People Who Are Ill***

Isolation is the separation of persons who have a specific infectious disease, and are infectious, from the general population to help prevent spread of this disease. Isolation may be voluntary or compelled on a mandatory basis through legal authority. People ordered into isolation may be cared for in their homes, hospitals, or in other healthcare settings.

### ***Quarantine: For People Who Have Been Exposed But Are Not Ill***

Quarantine is the separation and restriction of movements of persons who have been exposed to an infectious agent but are not yet ill. These individuals are potentially infectious and the quarantine is intended to stop the potential spread of the disease. Quarantine may be voluntary or compelled on a mandatory basis by legal authority and may be applied on an individual or group level. Quarantine is usually enforced in a home setting but other facilities may also be utilized for quarantine.

### ***Legal Authority For Isolation and Quarantine***

Isolation and/or quarantine may be instituted by public health officials in the event of an outbreak of a disease dangerous to the public's health. "Police powers," or the authority of a state government to enact laws and promote regulations to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of its citizens, authorize states to compel isolation and quarantine. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), in cooperation with local public health authorities, has the legal authority to enforce isolation and quarantine (105 CMR 300.200).

Federal isolation and quarantine orders are issued through executive order of the President. Quarantinable diseases include: cholera, diphtheria, infectious tuberculosis, plague, smallpox, yellow fever and viral hemorrhagic fevers. On April 4, 2003 SARS was added to the list of federally quarantinable diseases.

